

Mr Chairman and members of the committee,

January 24, 2011

My name is Emily McKey, and I live in Potomac, MT. I am the mother of 2 boys, now ages 11 and 13. My family's experience with GALs began 7 years ago when I made the decision to leave my husband. I had been living with abuse for most of my marriage, and now felt there was no alternative, as the focus of abuse turned to our young sons. I left despite my husband's threats that he would, in his words, "make all of your lives hell."

Six months after our eventful separation-filled with guns, threats, police, hiding out at friends' homes, broken orders of protection, court hearings, supervised parenting places that refused to allow my husband to return because they felt he was not safe,.....I requested a GAL. I made this request feeling as if there was no alternative. My husband and I couldn't talk- in person, via mediation, email, or over the phone, without his threatening me. A GAL made sense to me- a neutral party who would have **our children's best interests** as the primary focus, to help us make parenting plans best for all involved. Requesting a GAL proved to be another turning point in our lives, but unfortunately not for the better.

Four and ½ years and two GALs later, in September 2008, I formed a support group for parents such as myself, who have GALs involved in their lives, and custody cases. I formed this group because of how isolated, and crazy, I felt. I had spent 4 & ½ years with a GAL who would call me, demanding I meet within the hour with \$500.00, with never a bill or receipt given. I had a GAL who changed our parenting plan without notifying me. I had a GAL who gave more and more time to the father, despite the concerns of professionals involved in our lives, and despite his never following guidelines mandated by the court. I had a GAL who told my children's therapist it seemed like time to shift focus away from our case because, in her words, "the gravy train is drying up." **I continue to have a GAL who tells me, as many of us are told, that she will be in our lives until our children turn 18.**

We named our group MSGG, or Montanans Supporting GAL Guidelines **because there are no guidelines for GALs to follow. There currently are no guidelines, no experience required, the most minimal of training, no oversight, and no grievance process** to which we can turn for help. **To make matters worse, GALs have judicial immunity, and are covered by the "no hearsay" clause. They have power limited only by the judge who assigns them to the case.** It is very difficult, if not impossible, to have a GAL removed, once they've been assigned to your case.

In closing, I am here to advocate for **the best interests of Montana children.** I believe *guidelines, training, oversight and accountability, and a grievance process* ARE ESSENTIAL to provide Montana children, and their families, the protection they deserve, *and* to allow GALs to do the beneficial work for which this role was created.

Respectfully,

Emily McKey
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